

Oral English for Secondary Schools

BULLETIN 283

LESTER K. ADE

Superintendent of Public Instruction



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FOREWORD

Any reorganization of the oral English program should be an attempt to bring it more closely into harmony with the social needs of the pupils. Innumerable investigations have confirmed casual observation that the spoken word is replacing the written word to an astonishing degree. The present-day demand for directness and rapidity of communication, accompanied by a multiplication of the means of communication, has greatly increased the significance of the spoken word.

Teachers and school administrators have consequently come to realize that a large proportion of the time allotted to the subject of English must be devoted to the development of effective speech. It is also recognized that much of the responsibility for providing speech experiences for all pupils in their normal, day-to-day activities rests upon the English teacher, and that the teachers of speech share in this responsibility by contributing to the program through special courses in oral English.

The approach to the problem is through instruction given to all the pupils by the regular teacher of English as an integral part of the regular English course. This brief bulletin is intended to describe to the regular English teacher the nature of the program in oral expression and to offer helpful suggestions for its development. It is hoped that the bulletin will stimulate teachers throughout the Commonwealth to work cooperatively in the development of a complete program in oral expression which will meet the social needs of the pupils in their respective communities.

This bulletin was written by Mr. Alan O. Dech, Adviser, Curriculum Construction, in collaboration with Miss Jane Ludgate, Head of Department of Speech, Edinboro State Teachers College, under the direction of Dr. Paul L. Cressman, Director, Bureau of Instruction. The members of the English Committee in the Department are Mr. Eugene P. Bertin, Chairman; Miss Margaret P. Durkin, and Mr. Alan O. Dech, Secretary.

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Superintendent of Public Instruction

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ORAL ENGLISH FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

I. GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

A. SOME PRIMARY PRINCIPLES

Oral communication is a social experience. It involves more than the development of certain skills such as breath control, clear enunciation, and body movements. When two or more people converse, there is an intermingling of personalities and the situation demands an adjustment of the ideas of both speaker and listener. When a speaker addresses an audience, his smile, his enthusiastic spirit, his humor, his sincerity, his logical mind, and many other factors become a part of the situation and determine the effectiveness of what he says. In any situation the total result of the inter-action of the speaker with the audience constitutes an experience involving numerous skills and the whole personality.

Oral expression is one of the major activities of life. It is not confined to any special phase of subject matter, nor is it limited as to time or manner. People everywhere are communicating orally with one another. In school, a large proportion of the activities in which the pupils engage requires some type of oral expression. Oral English may be considered not as a subject but as an experience, and the development of a program insuring the success of the pupils in this experience is the responsibility of every teacher.

REAL LIFE SITUATIONS

A major aim in a school program designed to improve the effectiveness of the oral activities must be that of providing experiences in oral expression which give satisfaction to the pupils. Such experiences can grow only out of life-like situations—situations in school requiring oral expression, situations closely simulating life, or situations out of school requiring speech activities.

The chief concern of the teacher is that of utilizing the existing situations or creating those which will challenge the pupils to express themselves. The primary consideration is that the pupil have a desire to speak because he has something to contribute to the discussion or program, and that he gain a feeling of success from the experience.

EMPHASIS ON THOUGHT RATHER THAN ON TECHNIQUE

Of almost equal importance is the emphasis by the teacher on such phases as the accuracy of the information, the judicious selection of illustrations, and the effective organization of the content. The beginning and ending of a speech should receive, for example, far

greater stress than the elimination of technical errors such as those in grammar or pronunciation. Although the teacher will recognize the need for the correction of errors of a more or less technical nature, she will consider them secondary to the necessity for giving the pupils speech experiences which satisfy their desires to express themselves. She will emphasize the thought side in preference to the technical phases and will utilize every situation in any classroom, or in the community, as an opportunity for oral communication.

INDIVIDUAL STYLE RECOGNIZED

Among the technical aspects is one which seems to be especially troublesome. Many pupils appear to have difficulties with the use of seemingly inappropriate colloquialisms and incorrect expressions. Studies indicate that the speech of individuals varies considerably from the set rules of literary style and that it, in many instances, seems even more effective. These variations may have become common usage and are therefore quite generally accepted as correct. Can we accept the viewpoint that the standards of our everyday language should constitute the criteria for judgment rather than the traditional standards of the long-established, but frequently out-moded, style of the classicists? The English teacher should insist first of all upon effectiveness and then seek the improvement of correctness. Only when the pupil realizes that a critical audience demands a certain standard of accuracy is he in the best possible frame of mind for a vigorous attack on errors.

B. THE PROGRAM IN ORAL COMMUNICATION

With the recognition that oral expression is a mode of life, a way of behaving, and an experience, has come the need for organizing the program about the major activities of oral communication in which people normally engage rather than about certain specific skills. Analyses seem to indicate that among the major activities are *conversation* and *discussion*, *explanation* and *argument*, *story telling* (including the relating of personal experiences), *speech making*, *parliamentary language* and *procedure*, and *social conversation*. The pupils should be given every possible opportunity to engage in these activities and derive satisfaction from the knowledge that they are growing in their abilities to perform them.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Many opportunities in and out of school can be utilized. The assembly programs, the club activities, the work of classes other than English, and numerous community organizations and agencies such as the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, the Future Farmers, church programs, and 4-H clubs are examples of real life situations which provide opportunity for oral activities. The extent to which oral activities are worthwhile in themselves determines to a large degree the effectiveness of the program.

FIXING TECHNIQUES

As these opportunities are given the pupils, it will be found necessary to fix certain speech techniques and skills by definitely scheduling drill periods. Although the emphasis during these periods may be on specific habits and skills as weaknesses are revealed and recorded for the individual pupil, the drill program should be planned similarly in terms of the large major activities. The units which follow illustrate the nature of the activities during these periods by offering suggestions for the activities to be engaged in by the pupils.

These drill units may be used in any order which seems desirable, and many others should be developed by the teacher as needed. With the necessary modifications for the year and the abilities of the class, the teachers may utilize them as occasions arise for drill; they should, however, not be considered as the basis and foundation of a program in oral expression. The foundation of the program is situations, in school or out, which make meaningful the experiences in oral communication and supply opportunity for activities worthwhile in themselves.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR UNITS

A. DISCUSSING PROBLEMS IN A GROUP

PURPOSES

1. To learn to participate in group discussion leading to the adoption of a plan.
2. To learn to express opinions clearly and effectively so that they will receive consideration by the group.
3. To learn to present effectively relevant information to the group.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss differences between debate and discussion.
2. Teacher-led discussions demanding decisions by the class.
3. Pupil-led discussions demanding decisions by a group.
4. Participation by every member of the group in discussion.
5. Develop questions suitable for discussion.
6. Determine responsibilities of discussion leader.
7. Formulate principles for good group discussion.
8. Evaluate individual contributions to a discussion.
9. Evaluate a group discussion.

B. TELLING A STORY

PURPOSES

1. To tell a personal incident or short anecdote clearly and entertainingly.
2. To learn the techniques for an effective beginning, the arrangement of details, the selection of vivid words, and an effective ending.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Tell personal incidents originating from experiences.
2. Formulate standards for the evaluation of stories.
 - a. Prompt beginning.
 - b. Selection of details contributing to the point.
 - c. Arrangement of details in climatic order.
 - d. Prompt ending.

3. Tell anecdotes not original.
4. Discuss purposes and appropriateness of anecdotes and personal incidents.
5. Hold anecdote and personal incident programs, giving opportunity to tell stories.
6. Discuss jokes as stories. Analyze types and appropriateness.
7. Evaluate the qualities of the several kinds of jokes.
8. Bring to class jokes told on radio and in movies, newspapers, and magazines. Evaluate them.
9. Tell an interesting story from a book or a motion picture for the purpose of making others want to read or see it.
10. Tell anecdotes or personal incidents to illustrate a definite point.
11. Keep a notebook of vivid words.

C. SELECTING A TOPIC AND PREPARING A SPEECH

PURPOSES

1. To learn how to select a topic for a speech.
2. To learn the techniques of preparing a speech.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine a situation demanding a speech. Prepare topics appropriate for the occasion.
2. Discuss topics suitable for different speech occasions.
3. Draw up standards for selecting topics for different occasions.
4. Select topics appropriate to particular occasions and prepare speeches for them.
5. Discuss and evaluate the different methods of organizing the materials for the speech.
6. Discuss and evaluate the most effective ways of beginning speeches for different occasions.
7. Discuss ways and means of practicing a speech before giving it.
8. Discuss the use of illustrations, stories, personal experiences, quotations, etc., as methods of making a speech interesting.
9. Relate in class illustrations, stories, personal experiences, anecdotes, etc.; point out the purpose of their use; discuss their fitness and effectiveness.

10. Keep a notebook record of all good illustrative materials such as stories, experiences, quotations, and anecdotes you can gather from your reading, conversations, and speeches.
11. Draw up standards for the effective planning of speeches for different occasions.
12. Invite well-known speakers to visit the class and discuss their own methods of preparing speeches.

D. SPECIAL OCCASIONS

PURPOSES

1. To learn how to prepare and give effective speeches for different occasions.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Organize the class into a "pep" meeting and give "rally" speeches for different occasions.
2. Discuss and develop standards for "rally" speeches.
3. Discuss the types of occasions requiring the introduction of persons to an audience.
4. Discuss the content of a speech of introduction and decide upon the elements of presentation necessary for its effectiveness.
5. Discuss the types and order of information in an announcement.
6. Practice making announcements before the class.
7. Prepare, after class discussion, an outline of the types of information to be included in the presentation of an award or a gift.
8. Discuss the kinds of occasions when awards and gifts should be presented and invent imaginary situations requiring presentations. Present awards and gifts to other members of the class.
9. Prepare acceptance speeches for the awards of gifts.
10. Discuss the nature of after-dinner speeches: the occasion demanding such speeches, their purposes, the kind of content, and the order of the ideas.
11. Hold a series of lunches in the cafeteria and organize the programs so as to permit all members of the class to give after-dinner speeches.
12. Invite a well-known speaker to discuss with the class the nature of after-dinner speeches and how to make them most effective.

E. SPEAKING OVER THE RADIO

PURPOSES

1. To gain a greater appreciation of radio speech.
2. To develop those qualities which are most admired in the most effective radio speakers.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss the types of voices that are effective on the radio and consider their pitch, placement of tone, rate, inflection, articulation.
2. Study the composition of radio speeches, noting particularly the short opening sentences, short Anglo-Saxon words, the brevity, and the types of conclusions.
3. Present various types of radio programs in which the class members attempt to speak before a homemade "mike," or a real one.
4. The class may select certain members for their similarity in tone, quality, or rate to prominent radio speakers.
5. Invite radio announcers or radio engineers of nearby stations to come to the school to speak.
6. Keep a radio log with comments on vocal elements in speech.
7. Develop standards for radio speaking, considering that the different types of programs requiring speech demand different standards.
8. Visit a broadcasting studio to observe a broadcasting.
9. Study and discuss the speech style of different announcers to determine good standards of speech.
10. Study and discuss the style of radio personalities to determine good standards of speech.

